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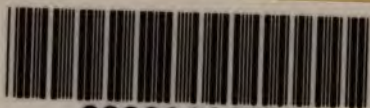
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THE STEPMOTHER



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# THE STEPMOTHER.

A DRAMATIC POEM.



# THE STEPMOTHER.

A DRAMATIC POEM.

BY

MRS LECKIE,

AUTHORESS OF THE HEBREW BOY ; POWER OF CONSCIENCE ; THE  
VILLAGE SCHOOL ; AND STORIES FOR THE YOUNG.



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MISS JOHNSON,  
THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED,  
WITH RESPECT AND AFFECTION,  
BY  
THE AUTHOR.

EDINBURGH, 4, STAFFORD STREET.



## CHARACTERS.

HUBERT,  
LIONEL, a Boy of fourteen years, } Sons of Sir Edward Osborne.  
ISABELLA, the Daughter of Sir Edward.  
LADY OSBORNE, their Stepmother.  
AUGUSTUS.

*The Scene is in Scotland.*



# THE STEPMOTHER.

## ACT I.

SCENE I.—*The sea-shore. An extensive Castle, on a high rocky cliff, is seen at a little distance close to the sea ; and near the top of the building a small grated window is seen. Lionel is gathering shells in a basket.*

*He sings the following Verses.*

Should joy light thy rosy smile,  
Sweet girl, believe me,  
Thy bliss would my care beguile,  
Why, then, thus leave me ?

When grief wrings thy tender heart,  
O ! still believe me !  
No charm could then tempt to part ;  
Could I deceive thee !

Thy love, in soft infancy,  
Cradled me near thee ;  
Thy song, my youth's early sigh  
Lulls, when I hear thee !

In life be our joys the same ;  
Happy when near thee !  
In death may one grave contain,  
'Then thou'lt ne'erleave me !

*He pauses, and after a little time, he sings Purcel's Song of " Mad  
Bess,"—at the conclusion of which he goes away.*

*Enter Hubert and Isabella.*

HUBERT. Grieve not, my sister, that I now must leave you.  
My home, you know, has long been hateful to me.  
In a short time, I trust I shall be able  
To bid you welcome to a brother's roof,  
And place poor Lionel where he shall be happy.

I should have wished to have remained in Scotland  
On your account and his; but marriage soon  
Will free you from our Stepdame's grievous thrall.

ISABELLA. I could have borne with patience her severity,  
In the sweet hope your kindness and protection  
Would end my slavery in a few short years;  
But the cruel sufferings of the unhappy boy,  
Whom I could neither rescue nor defend,  
Have made my life most wretched.

His gentle disposition and affection,  
To a kind heart had made the task most easy  
To aid his weakened mind and feeble frame.

But stern, unfeeling harshness, constant mockery,  
Have not alone destroyed all hoped improvement,  
They shake his trembling nerves with fear-like madness.

HUBERT. My frequent absence kept me ignorant of it.  
You should have told me, and informed my father.  
Does he not know the truth?

ISABELLA. 'Twould be in vain to tell him. Lady Osborne



Would soon unsay it all ; and he believes her ;  
Sees as she pleases, as she pleases, hears.  
Besides, he is so cold, so distant to me,  
I have not resolution to complain.

All his affection towards me she destroyed ;  
Nor in his children can she bear a rival.  
Her tyranny has made my duties odious,  
From the harsh way they always were enforced.  
I am subdued, and tremble in her presence ;  
And only happy when I do not see her.

No principle of justice or of mercy  
Would stop her where her interest directs.

HUBERT. 'Tis strange that one of manner so repulsive,  
With features that can awe, but not attract ;  
Devoid, too, of the softness that so charms !  
Should hold such fascination o'er a mind  
So moulded, so quick-sighted, as my Father's !  
For though he now is stern and most unkind,  
I well remember him in early life  
All gentle and indulgent ; most impartial ;  
Till this fell tyrant won his heart and hand.

ISABELLA. The unfailing influence of talent,  
Combining with a reach of female art,  
Which you can scarcely guess at, is her power.  
Endowed, too, with persuasive, honied eloquence,  
“ Which makes the worse appear the better reason.”

She can assume all softness when she pleases ;  
Nor does she ever venture to display  
Her fierce, bold nature in Sir Edward's presence,  
For then, she knows, her influence would end.

Before the omnipotence of superior talent,  
Whoe'er possesses its resistless power,  
All other charms will quickly bow and yield to.  
But when this rare, high gift becomes a scourge  
To those within its sphere, and not a blessing,  
Severe calamity will then avenge  
The double guilt to Heaven, of such perversion.

HUBERT. Her punishment, and most just retribution,  
Will fall upon her ere she is much older.

ISABELLA. My father has consented that poor Lionel  
Should spend some time with me at my own house.  
Poor boy ! he loves me much.  
His only wish is to be ever near me

Nature has given him one single gift ;  
He has a voice, whose clear melodious tones  
No Nightingale can rival.  
His chief delight is music ; and he echoes  
Whatever song he hears.  
The saddest he prefers. And though the words  
Are wildly plaintive, yet they always breathe  
The feelings of his heart.

He does not know he shall go home with me ;  
I have not yet rejoiced him with the news.

*Lionel enters, with a basket of shells.*

ISABELLA. My dearest boy, I am to leave you soon.

LIONEL. But you will soon return ?

ISABELLA. No, I shall live far distant from this Castle.

LIONEL. Oh ! take me with you ! do not leave me here !

ISABELLA. Should you be happy, then, to live with me ?

LIONEL. Oh happy ! truly happy ! will you take me ?

ISABELLA. As soon as I reach home I'll send for you.

LIONEL. But do send very quickly!

*Lionel sings the following Verses.*

Sweet Sister! turn thy gentle ear,  
That ne'er was deaf to misery's call!  
Oh! list poor Lionel's humble prayer,  
Who rests on thee, his Guard, his All!

*Lionel kneels.*

Oh! save me from their cruel scorn!  
From the fierce Stepdame's iron power,  
Who threats to dash my feeble form  
From the dread sea-rock's battling Tower!

*He rises.*

For thee I'll find the loveliest gems  
That sparkle near great Ocean's bed,  
I'll cull sweet buds with tender stems,  
To grace thy bower, or deck thy head!

SCENE II.—*A terraced garden within the walls of the Castle. Isabella is seated alone. She sings the following Verse, and plays on the lute. Twilight.*

As the far wandering Pilgrim burns,  
And hails his home of promised rest,  
The rainbow Dove of Peace returns,  
And nestles in my sheltering breast!

*Augustus enters.*

AUGUSTUS. My Isabella!  
I heard thine Angel voice, and blest its tones!

To-morrow we shall leave this gloomy Castle.

A beauteous bower is ready to receive thee;  
And ample wealth, at thy command, shall bless  
Thy generous heart with power to aid the helpless.

A husband's tenderness shall soon restore  
The cheerfulness which best becomes thy youth,  
And purity of mind.

ISABELLA. I trust, with perfect confidence and hope,  
My future years to thy long-tried affection ;  
Nor should a thought of sadness now be dwelt on,  
Could I but know the affection of a father.  
For, while he bears himself with such estrangement,  
I am not truly happy.  
Poor Hubert, too !—driven from an unkind home !  
Whene'er a tempest shakes the Castle walls  
I tremble for his safety on the sea.

AUGUSTUS. I do not wonder at your pain in parting  
From one so justly loved, and fond of thee ;  
But trust me, Isabella, for his sake  
'Tis better as it is.

How often do we see the pampered Heirs  
Of Fortune squander, in wild waste and folly,  
The means which Heaven has lent for other ends ?  
And in the place of blessing, by example,  
Their only use in life has been to warn.

Adversity's severe but useful school  
We *all* require to go through.  
'Tis *Her* stern lesson teaches us to feel,  
And to relieve the sorrows of each other.

“ She tames the human breast ” to softest pity.  
Without her curb we’d think but of ourselves ;  
Were there no evil no good could exist.

Your brother, by high conduct, will acquire  
A name ; which, nursed in idleness, he’d ne’er have gain’d.

ISABELLA. If with a mother’s tenderness and care,  
The orphans of her husband had been reared,  
Our Stepdame would have won our hearts, our love ;  
And mutual happiness had then resulted.

AUGUSTUS. She only holds in scorn such gentle virtues,  
As if they are unworthy of her culture.  
They are not made for her.  
No middling course ; no common-place endowment,  
Need e’er be look’d for in a mind like hers,  
But rather the extreme of good or evil.  
I’ve oft observed her ; and have thought she felt  
As if through life her powers were thrown away.

Think not, even were she once possessed of all  
The eye takes in from the most lofty mountain,  
’Twould satisfy her restless, craving wishes.  
Had she an Empire, it would soon be valueless ;  
And new desires would spring up in her bosom.

There is a grandeur and a daring energy  
In her bold, fearless intellect.  
She seems as if originally created  
For something greater, better ;  
And destined for a higher sphere of action.  
But now misplaced by circumstance and fate,  
She is a bane, a blight, to all around her.

I'll shortly find the means to unmask this Fiend,  
Remove thy Father's prejudice,—restore  
His lost affection to his injured children.

---

SCENE III.—*Twilight. A Gothic chamber in the Castle. Lady  
Osborne enters alone, in deep mourning.*

LADY OSBORNE. Now bounteous Fate has crown'd my  
anxious wishes.

The cloud that hung betwixt the Sun and me  
At last removed for ever ; and kind Fortune  
Has made my child the Heir of these domains.  
The deep sea hides the eldest hope of Osborne !

The maniac Boy, the fool, is set aside.



The Sister, too, the rival of my daughters,  
Is wedded ; and no more an inmate here.

By splendid marriage to promote the rank  
Of my own offspring, is my chief aim now.  
The wealth their Sire possesses, all must centre  
In me, and in my children.

But I suspect this Howard, Sir Edward's friend,  
Who came so lately, unexpected, here.  
I fear he knows too well the real truth,—  
My hatred of the Orphans.  
My husband's usual confidence in me  
Seems changed since Howard came.  
They're much together ; and their plans I guess.  
They're now with Isabella.

Could I once know the purpose of her father,  
I have no doubt my art would soon defeat it.

I must have instant access to his knowledge.

Except the feeble Boy, all are now absent.

There is a secret dungeon in the Castle.

A private staircase cut, within the walls,  
Gives entrance to the Vault.  
'Tis guarded by a strong and ironed board,  
Like a portcullis.  
A door concealed with skilful, nicest art,  
Gives access from the Prison to the Study,  
Where I shall find the evidence I want.  
I have the key. The evening gloom now shades me.

*As she is going, she pauses, and slowly returns.*

What strange confusion of the mind comes o'er me !  
I feel as if I saw, for the last time,  
Familiar objects near me ; and that a long,  
A last farewell, on th' eve of a far journey,  
From which I never, never, should return,  
Is veiling them in mist, away from sight !

And now a shivering horror chills my blood !

I seem to stand within the lone Churchyard  
Which holds the Monument of Osborne's Line,  
With high emblazon'd scutcheon ; skulls and bones  
In bright heraldic painting ;  
Its ponderous doors seem yawning to receive me !  
And flitting Shades advance and hover near,

The grinning Spectres, with their skeleton arms,  
Now beckon me to come within the Vault !

A radiant Angel, in the form of Hubert,  
Stands in a dripping shroud !  
And while with pallid look he gazes on me,  
Points with triumphant finger to the Tomb !

The deep toll of the passing knell of Death  
Sounds in mine ears, and, to my shuddering sense,  
Announces thus the winding up of all !

What can this mean ?  
Is it a waking dream, or sudden frenzy ?  
Or warning to deter my rash resolve  
Of visiting the Dungeon ?  
There the sad captive oft has pined unheard.  
And I've been told a Skeleton was found  
Within its walls, of some poor wretch who died  
Alone, unaided, in that den of misery !

Away with this vain, silly superstition,  
Which, in another, I should laugh to scorn.  
I'll lose no further time, lest some intrude.

*She goes towards the secret stair behind a window-shutter ; opens a  
spring-board, and ascends, and shuts the board. The scene  
closes.*

## ACT II.

SCENE I.—*Evening. A dungeon with bare stone walls and floor. A small grated window near the roof. Fetters hanging from the wall. A large, strong, ironed board is sunk in the wall to the floor. A key is seen in a pannel. Lady Osborne is on the floor, alone.*

*Lionel is heard singing at a distance.*

“ Oh ! save me ! save me !  
Sweet Sister ! dearest Isabella, hear !  
Oh ! save me from their cruel scorn,  
From the fierce Stepdame’s iron power,  
Who threatens to dash my feeble form  
From the dread sea-rock’s battling Tower !”

LADY OSBORNE, (*rising.*) ’Tis Lionel’s voice I hear.  
My feeble cry has not the strength to reach him.

And if it had, he'd fly the dreaded sound,  
With trembling terror!

Poor child ! no wonder that he fears me thus !  
I little thought the time would ever come  
When this weak boy, whom like a worm I crushed ;  
Whose streaming tears my harshness often forced ;  
Whom my fierce threatenings threw, oft kneeling low,  
Even at my feet ! Ah ! little thought I *then*,  
The day of retribution would revolve,  
When he alone could save my wretched life,  
And shield me from these agonies I suffer !

*Lionel sings.*

“ In her, thought is as great,  
Great as a King !”

LADY OSBORNE. His wild and maniac Song  
Sounds in mine ears like my own funeral-knell !

His shriek heard in the howling, furious gale,  
Seems, to my guilty conscience, like the Voice  
Of an Avenging Spirit, sent to wreak  
The Orphan's wrongs on my devoted head !

No menial hastes to free me !  
No friendly hand comes near to moist my lip,  
And cool this raging fever !  
Mercy, mercy, heaven ! [*Faints.*

---

SCENE II.—*Evening. The court before the Castle. Lionel enters and sings.*

Caught in the hunter's deadly snare,  
See the fell She-wolf's dying pangs !  
The lamb, the kid, now sportive share  
The verdant mead, nor dread her fangs !

The unerring bolt hath swiftly pierced  
The Eagle pouncing from above ;  
The trembling, tender Dove now hears  
Her rescued mate's soft note of love !

Though wildest storms of thunder crush  
This gloomy Castle's haughty Head,  
The beauteous dawn again shall blush,  
And bless the Shepherd's lowly shed.

Auspicious Hope shall bring the Morn,  
The rosy hours shall lead the Day,  
Which, though obscured by midnight storm,  
Through tempest darts the heavenly ray.

---

SCENE III.—*Midnight, and obscure moonlight. A Churchyard, with a large handsome Monument in the centre, with a scutcheon in front; and the doors of the Vault wide open; grave-stones all round. Spectres are seen to flit to and fro, out of, and into the Vault. They chant the following Verses in a faint, suppressed tone, like an echo.*

*First Shade.*

Prepare the shroud, the pall, the bier;  
The King of Terrors rears on high  
His Dart to strike! I see him near!  
I hear her gasping, struggling sigh!

*Second Shade.*

Inclosed within Cyclopean walls,  
Thy feeble moan shall bring no aid!  
The gale, the storm, the thunder's voice,  
Shall drown thy cries till life itself is fled!

*Third Shade.*

Like Fury's hiss,  
The surge's lash  
Shall laugh to scorn  
Thy pangs, thy woe !  
And late Remorse,  
With rankling tooth,  
Shall aid Fierce Famine's deadly throe !

*Shade of a Boy.*

A cup filled with the Orphan's tears  
Shall mock her lip :—her vain grasp tire !  
No dew from heaven,—no stream shall quench  
Her parching fever's burning fire !

*Shade of Hubert.*

I come from Ocean's cavern'd gloom,  
To hail Thee, Tenant of the Tomb,  
Whose hand hath cut, before my time,  
My thread of life, in early prime,  
While yet that life was May !



No husband shall with love, though vain,  
 Support thy head, and lull thy pain,  
 And stop the arrest of Death !  
 No child with anxious, soothing part,  
 Shall watch, with mourning, bleeding heart,  
 To catch thy fleeting breath !

Come ! haste, and join the Dance of Death !

Behold the Shades in dread array !  
 They shun the glare of garish Day,  
 They haunt Night's blackest noon !  
 List ! hear their whisper's voiceless " Hush !" —  
 They fly the light, the morning blush ;  
 In myriads, see ! grim Spectres gleam,  
 They love no cheering, gladdening beam !

*Chorus of all the Shades. They chant in a solemn, low, lugubrious tone.*

No hand can stay Thy doom,  
 Or save from Death's tremendous power ;  
 Thy doom is fix'd, This Fatal Hour !

ALL HASTEN TO THE TOMB !

*The Spectres continue to flit about a short time, while a funeral bell is tolling. The scene then closes.*

SCENE IV. *and last.*—*Lady Osborne's Prison, midnight. A violent storm. She is kneeling on the floor.*

LADY OSBORNE. Three dreadful nights!

Poor Orphans! you are now at last revenged!

The brave young Heir, whose high and generous mind  
Would have reflected honour on his name,  
I banish'd from his home! My stony heart  
Rejoiced and triumphed when the ocean hid  
His loved and mourned remains!

Isabella! Thy father's harshness  
I goaded. I destroyed his love of thee!  
And with a grasping avarice I grudged  
The dower thy legal right and virtues claimed!

The gentle boy, whose meek and timid spirit  
Required each tender, kind, and soothing care,  
I drove by terror to the brink of frenzy!

My children! hear your wretched mother's moans;  
She now expires within a living grave!

One little crumb of bread, one drop of water,  
The beggar at my gate can surely spare,  
And I will kneel and bless him !

[*Faints, loud thunder.*

LADY OSBORNE, (*reviving.*) I raise my head to meet the  
tempest's rage !

Oh ! that the fork'd destructive lightning's dart  
Would strike this withering brain, and smite me dead !  
Oh ! that the kind, the friendly hand of death  
Would end these pangs, these gnawing, vulture pangs,  
This scorching, burning thirst !  
Death, death alone, can quench the parching fever  
Within my throbbing temples ; and the fire  
That sears my sightless eye-balls !

An icy coldness now benumbs all pain.

The yawning monument, the beckoning spectres,  
Were then no dream ! I join the grisly band !

[*Shuddering.*

I die ! May those severe and lingering tortures  
Be a full expiation of my guilt,  
And bring blessed pardon to my parting soul !

THE END.

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